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SUBJECT: DEADLY HINDU-MUSLIM RIOTS HIT MYSORE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Clashes between Hindus and Muslims in the town of Mysore (in the state of Karnataka, 150 km west of Bangalore) left three dead on July 2. The immediate cause of the riots was the discovery of two pig heads in a building housing a mosque and madrassa (a type of Islamic school). The building, located in a largely Hindu part of town and formerly a school, has been at the center of a local land dispute for more than a year. The police restored order fairly quickly, raiding homes of known Muslim and Hindu extremists and seizing a hoard of bladed and blunt-edged weapons. End Summary.

Pig heads in Muslim complex spark clashes

¶2. (U) Clashes broke out between Muslims and Hindus in the Gayathripuram area of Mysore (150 km west of Bangalore) on July 2 following the discovery of two pig heads in a building that houses a mosque and a madrassa. Muslim rioters allegedly stabbed to death a migrant Hindu construction worker on his way to work. Hindu rioters then allegedly stabbed fatally two Muslims (one a 14-year-old boy) in retaliation. The rioters damaged multiple buildings and places of business, according to press reports.

¶3. (SBU) Some violence continued on July 3, which may or may not have been directly related to the events on July 2. The head of the Mysore district's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, a Hindu-oriented national party) youth wing was beaten and stabbed outside of his home, as was a Muslim acquaintance (both remain hospitalized). A state-level police official involved in the response to the riots told us, however, that the attack may have been the result of a business or personal dispute, as the BJP leader was known to be active in money-lending and organizing small-time gambling operations. He also told us that police began raiding the homes of known Hindu and Muslim extremists on July 3 to seize weapons and head off further violence. He said that police seized "a half-ton" of swords, daggers, iron rods, and other weapons in the raids. He also told us that the local police managed the initial outbreak of violence poorly, allowing things to escalate.

¶4. (SBU) A local reporter for one of India's main national dailies told us that the police had withdrawn on June 30 a temporary police station in the area set up in April to control possible violence in the run-up to the national elections. (No violence was reported in the area during that time, but the area is known for tensions between the Muslim and Hindu communities.) The state police officer told us that extremists from both communities purposefully took advantage of the withdrawal to launch the rioting.

Whodunnit?

15. (U) It is not yet clear who desecrated the mosque/madrassa, but initial suspicions are falling on a local Hindu extremist group, the Hindar Jagran Vedike (HJV), known for its provocations. Following the attack on the BJP youth wing leader, the HJV called for a general strike ("bandh") on July 4. Press reports of the strike stated that it closed businesses and disrupted transportation in commercial and residential areas throughout the city.

Land dispute, politics at the heart of the matter

16. (U) The roots of the problem appear to extend back to the December 2008 decision of an Islamic trust to convert the building it owned in the mainly Hindu area from a general private school (open to members of all faiths) into a mosque/madrassa complex, according to a former editor of a local newspaper. A local politician, recently defected from the Congress Party to the Hindu-oriented Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), objected to this decision and filed legal action to prevent it, obtaining a stay order from a local court. The court eventually removed the stay order in April 2009, at approximately the same time as the police established the temporary police station in the area.

17. (U) A different journalist told us that elections for the Mysore City Council set to occur in the next six months also played a role in increasing local tensions, as the Congress Party and the BJP vie for local supremacy. He explained that the BJP is trying to woo the votes of Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables" in the Hindu social order and hitherto part of Congress's vote base in the area) by pitting them against Muslims, who generally share a similarly low

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economic status. The BJP, he said, is offering Dalits posts in various party committees, and Hindu extremist groups are looking to whip up anti-Muslim sentiment.

Comment

18. (SBU) With local elections in the area on the horizon, many observers are expecting more violence in the coming months. The head of the Congress Party in Karnataka hails from Mysore, making it a tempting target for the BJP to take, and raising the stakes for Congress to keep the city in Congress's fold (it elected a Congress Party candidate in the recent parliamentary elections, despite the BJP winning the lion's share of seats in Karnataka). Congress will have its hands full trying to keep its voting base together.

SIMKIN